Badmouthing

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One day I said something hurtful about my friend and hurt their feelings. I get flashbacks of that memory sometimes and feel uneasy.

That day, I met with a few of my friends as planned, and we chatted about some everyday things, like how our summer homework was going and our latest favorite manga/anime characters and celebrities. The conversation gradually moved on to club and school activities, and we started talking about a particular friend. I happened to have some frustrations with that person myself, so I joined in without thinking much. At first, it felt like a simple venting session, but as we shared more about the things that annoyed us or made us upset, the atmosphere heated up. Before we knew it, the conversation escalated into outright badmouthing. Even when it came to things that hadn't really bothered me before, I found myself nodding along, saying, "Yeah, I know what you mean." After a while, one friend who had been listening said "Hey, that's enough" and stopped us from saying any more nasty things. In that instant, an awkward silence filled the air, and I was at a loss for words. Looking back, I realize that instead of feeling guilty, I was more annoyed that they had disrupted our lively conversation. Later, the friend we had been talking about found out what we had said and was deeply hurt.

We had spoken irresponsibly, thinking "As long as they don't find out, it's fine." There was a strange sense of unity in sharing those words with the group—a kind of twisted camaraderie. But in reality, this was *bullying*, even though I hadn't realized at the time.

Many things happen every day when you act in groups. Naturally, there are people who we don't get along with or disagree with. I think that we all have an experience of saying something unkind about such people at some point in our lives. However, what we did wrong was turn our friend into a scapegoat and treat badmouthing as entertainment. We also lacked the ability to put ourselves in their shoes. Speaking badly of someone behind their back is bullying.

I have a weakness—I tend to get swept up in the moment without thinking deeply about my actions. Even though I've been hurt by harsh words, I couldn't stop myself from

saying harsh words about someone else. I wasn't able to think about how the friend I was talking about would feel, and if no one had stepped in to stop us, our words could have escalated even further. When I think about that, I regret my thoughtless behavior even more. You can't take back words once you've said them. I reflected deeply on my actions and apologized to my friend. They were kind enough to accept my apology, but our relationship has not yet fully returned to how it was before. A lingering tension remains.

There is a Japanese phrase that means "reading the room." It refers to an attitude of keenly sensing the mood of a situation and behaving accordingly. There is even a slang term, "KY," which is used to mock people who can't sense the mood. This phrase is used to make fun of people who don't go along with the crowd, sometimes even when they're standing up for what's right. I don't mean to blame our behavior on this phrase, but I feel like we are overly sensitive to the idea of "reading the room" and bound by it. The fear of being seen as someone who "can't read the room" creates a negative mindset that influences our actions, and I feel that such negative feeling is also reflected in our behavior. We saw the friend who stopped us badmouthing at that time as "KY." I remember feeling like, "Why are they acting like they're so good, spoiling our conversation?" However, now I understand how much courage it took for them speak up and stop us, and I genuinely admire them for it.

During the summer vacation this year, the Olympic Games were held in Paris, and there were news reports of the excellent performances of many Japanese athletes every day. But at the same time, some negative aspects were also focused on, such as social media being flooded with hateful comments about those who didn't win. Seeing this, I felt angry—how could people say such cruel things about athletes who had worked so hard? Hiding behind anonymity to throw insults is cowardly. However, I realized that what I did towards my friend was essentially the same thing. Talking behind someone's back, thinking "It's fine as long as they don't find out," wasn't I just as cowardly as those anonymous haters?

If I could go back to that day, would I have the courage to say, "Why don't you say that to their face?" It's been a year since that day. The time it takes to be able to talk with my friend without any lingering awkwardness is also the time for me to confront my weaknesses. I never want to make the same mistake again. Looking forward, I want to take responsibility for my words and always try to see things from other people's perspective.